

# **EXHIBIT 12**

## **Fact Sheet: Unique Atlantic Canyons Protected from Oil and Gas Activity**

Today, the President designated 31 Atlantic canyons off limits to oil and gas exploration and development activity due to their critical and irreplaceable ecological value. The Atlantic canyons themselves, majestic geologic features carved by glacial runoff or by rivers that once flowed overland and were submerged by rising seas after the last ice age, have incredible ecological importance. The massive underwater canyons are home to many species and have been the subject of scientific exploration and discovery since the 1970s.

This action builds on the President's creation of the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument, which protects 4,913 square miles of marine ecosystems located 130 miles southeast of Cape Cod. Today's action withdraws from oil and gas leasing, exploration, and development the remaining 31 major Atlantic canyons that are not already protected by the National Monument, ensuring these unique biological and geological resources will not be impacted by any future oil and gas activities in this area. The canyons are located in U.S. waters along the Atlantic continental shelf break running from Heezen Canyon offshore New England to Norfolk Canyon offshore the Chesapeake Bay. The withdrawn area totals 5,990 square miles (or 3.8 million acres).

Ocean temperatures in the Northeast U.S. are projected to increase three times faster than the global average, according to a study released earlier this year by the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Additionally, the first of several assessments to analyze the impacts of climate change on fish stocks and fishing-dependent communities found that warming oceans are threatening the majority of fish species in the region including salmon, lobster, and scallops. Today's designation will help safeguard the resilience of that unique ecosystem, ensure a refuge for at-risk species, and protect these natural laboratories for scientists to monitor and explore the impacts of climate change.

- Today's action recognizes the unique marine environment in the Atlantic and fishing's critical role in the region's economy and culture. Specifically, the withdrawal includes areas that support habitat important to commercial and recreational fisheries. The withdrawal does not impact ocean uses beyond mineral exploration and development.

The canyons are a defining characteristic of the Atlantic continental margin offshore the east coast of the United States. The canyons were formed when sea level was lower and rivers flowed to the margin of the continental shelf before the canyons were flooded by the sea when ice melted after the last glacial maximum some 25,000 years ago. The largest canyon is Hudson Canyon, which reaches depths in excess of 10,000 feet and is comparable in scale to the Grand Canyon, which is 6,093 feet at its deepest.

The canyons are widely recognized as hotspots of biodiversity, biologically unique, and ecologically and economically valuable for fisheries. The protected areas provide:

- Habitat for endemic and numerous other species, including deep-water corals, deep diving beaked whales, commercially valuable fishes, and significant numbers of habitat-forming soft and hard corals, sponges, and crabs;

impacted by climate change. The canyons provide important shelf and slope habitat heterogeneity that could offer refuge for species potentially impacted by climate change.

Oil and gas activities have the potential to impact the seafloor wherever these activities occur. This includes discharge of oil, drilling muds, cuttings, and other debris that could affect seafloor habitats in the immediate vicinity of a well. Bottom disturbance associated with drilling, infrastructure emplacement, pipeline trenching, and removal of structures could also affect the seafloor. The withdrawal of these canyons from mineral leasing will help protect habitats, preserve critical ecological hot spots, conserve economically valuable fisheries, afford long-term opportunity for research and exploration, and help ensure that species dependent on the habitats of the canyons are protected.

The effect of a Presidential withdrawal is to indefinitely exclude the withdrawn area from leasing for mineral exploration and development. The President previously used this authority in December 2014 and January 2015 when he withdrew from leasing the Bristol Bay off of Alaska, home to world-class fisheries and stunning beauty, and certain areas of the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas because of their critical ecological and cultural values.

The Atlantic canyon region has a very limited oil and gas history, with no active leases since the mid-1990s and no production of oil and gas. The potential impact on hydrocarbon resources is estimated to be minimal. Oil and exploration and development would also be challenging due to technical and operational risks related to the canyon geology.